Heidi Curley, owner of the historic Farrell house in Camas, hopes to one day open her property up to be used for catered events that would draw anywhere from 10 to 100 people. Some neighbors have voiced concern about the proposal. A public hearing will be held July 28.

HEATHER ACHESON/POST-RECORD

Farrell house proposal draws opposition from neighbors

Public hearing will be held July 28

BY HEATHER ACHESON
Post-Record staff

The owner of the historic Farrell house has dreams of one day making her home and property the site of tea parties, weddings, anniversary celebrations, and other special events — once again opening the dramatic landmark house to the community.

"This is my home," said Heidi Curley, who purchased it from the Farrell family one year ago. "I want to share what we are lucky to have."

To make that dream happen, Curley must ultimately be granted an unclassified use permit by the city. The next step in that process is a public hearing in front of the Planning Commission on Thursday, July 28, at 7 p.m., at the Camas Public Library. According to city Planner Sarah Fox, the Planning Commission will make a recommendation to the City Council, the body that will make the final decision on the issue.

Curley's proposed plan calls for the property and house, built in Greek Revival architectural style circa 1915 at 416 N.E. Ione St., to offer catered events with attendance numbers ranging from 10 to up to 100 people. Most events, the application states, would draw from 30 to 60 people.

"They are going to be really nice events," said Curley, who has been overseeing major interior and exterior renovations of the house and grounds and hopes to officially move in later this summer. "They are things you'd want to be invited to."

That enthusiasm, however, is not shared by some of her neighbors.

Tom Martin, whose home is adjacent to the Farrell house property, said the biggest concerns he has about the proposal are the potential for issues with loud noise and a reduction in property values.

"If it does become what is proposed," he said, "we believe every neighbor within a couple of blocks is going to give up something because of it."

Martin said approval of the application could set a precedent that would be detrimental to the established neighborhood.

"We don't want commercial [uses] in our neighborhood because we don't want to add another use," he said. "We don't want to set a precedent."

The Farrell house is located in a primarily residential neighborhood,

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which also includes Camas Friends Church on Northeast Third Avenue, as well as Zion Lutheran Church and Brown's Funeral Home at its perimeter along Garfield Street, which also separates the neighborhood from the downtown core.

According to the application, special temporary features that could be required during events held on the property include a tent, altar, rest room trailer, and other landscape features or equipment.

Curley has entered into an agreement with Camas Friends Church to provide off-street event parking in its lot, and she said the owners of Brown's Funeral Home are also willing to make its parking lot available when possible.

Events, she said, would not be held past 10 p.m.

"No doubt about it. It would be a big change," said Martin, who has lived in his home for seven years. "I bought my house to raise my kids in a nice Camas neighborhood. I didn't expect this.

"I love my house, it is a great house," he continued. "But I wouldn't have bought it if I knew the Farrell house was going to be an event center."

Curley said portraying her proposal as an effort to turn the house into an "event center" is not accurate.

"This is my home. This is where I will live with my children," she said. "It is not an event center. I think that is the biggest misconception."

Curley said she would like to make her home an asset to the neighborhood and the community, and a benefit to other local businesses.

"It's not something I've thought about lightly," she said. "I just feel like it will be a win-win thing for everybody.

"My hopes and dreams are the same hopes and dreams you have for your home," she added. "I certainly don't want to have any hard feelings between me and my neighbors."

Martin said the proposed use is simply not the right fit for the neighborhood.

"It's not personal, it's just about the plan."

PUBLIC HEARING SET

- A public hearing pertaining to Heidi Curley's unclassified use permit application for the historic Farrell house will be held in front of the Camas Planning Commission on Thursday, July 28, at 7 p.m., in the upstairs meeting room at the Camas Public Library, 625 N.E. Fourth Ave.

- The application and site plan can be viewed at www.camaspostrecord.com. A staff report will be issued on Tuesday, July 19, and will be posted online at www.ci.camas.wa.us.